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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/LOGERFO

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TAGS: KPAL KWBG PREL IS ASEC
SUBJECT: HAMAS FIRES QASSAMS INTO ISRAEL; INTENSE
FATAH-HAMAS CLASHES

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Following the June 9 deaths of 8 Palestinian civilians by a suspected errant Israeli shell, HAMAS militants launched a barrage of Qassam rockets into Israel. In statements to the media, PM Haniyyah and other PA government spokesmen called on the international community to halt Israeli attacks on Palestinians. HAMAS representatives in Beirut and Damascus took a more confrontational line, indicating in remarks reported in the press that the tahdi'ah (period of calm) had expired and defending the right of Palestinians to resist "Israeli aggression." In Gaza, HAMAS militants attacked several prominent Preventive Security Organization (PSO) officers June 9-12, triggering intense gun-battles. END SUMMARY.

HAMAS Responds with Threats,
Barrage of Qassam Rockets

¶2. (C) The death of 8 Palestinian civilians received widespread local attention on June 9, with media reports attributing the deaths to an errant Israeli shell. In response to the civilian deaths, HAMAS militants June 9 distributed a leaflet promising an "earthquake of attacks in Zionist towns." A HAMAS military wing spokesman identified only as Abu Ubaydah told al-Jazeera television June 9 that Israel has given the "Palestinian resistance no choice but to retaliate." HAMAS and other factions claimed credit for launching at least 32 Qassam rocket attacks at Israel on the evening of June 9. On June 11, an IAF strike killed two HAMAS militants, Salem al-Radi' and Mohammad al-Masri, who were reportedly responsible for several of the Qassam attacks. Between June 9 and 12, HAMAS, PIJ, and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades militants launched at least 61 Qassam rockets into Israel.

Government Spokesmen Balance
Fury with Political Caution

¶3. (C) In June 10 statements to the media, PM Haniyyah and PA Cabinet Spokesman Ghazi al-Hamad called on the international community to halt "Israeli aggression." PM Haniyyah declined to comment whether HAMAS would continue to uphold the tahdi'ah. Al-Hamad told reporters that it was "inconceivable that Israel targets civilians while the Palestinians remain silent. There must be a serious stance taken by all the factions to confront this aggression." Gaza PLC member Salah al-Bardawil suggested to Israeli reporters on June 10 that HAMAS' military response would be limited to Qassam rockets

saying, HAMAS would undertake "a measured response."

External Leadership
Emphasizes Resistance

¶ 14. (C) The external HAMAS leadership, however, emphasized the precedence of resistance in their public statements. Damascus-based leader Khaled Mish'al defended HAMAS' right to renew attacks on Israel during a June 11 statement to al-Jazeera. "It is the right of the Palestinian people to defend itself from the enemy." From Beirut, HAMAS representative Osama al-Hamdan told reporters June 10 that the tahdi'ah had expired and HAMAS' actions will be dictated by "field developments and considerations." HAMAS PLC member Mushir al-Masri struck a similar tone with Palestinian reporters saying, "There will be no calm or truce with the occupation since the truce expired at the end of 2005 according to the Cairo Understandings." HAMAS Political Bureau Spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri told reporters June 11 that all resistance groups, including HAMAS, have the right to respond as necessary to the "vicious crimes of the Israeli occupation."

Ongoing PSO-HAMAS Clashes

¶ 15. (C) A senior PSO officer, Basem al-Qutob, was shot and killed in Gaza City at 0130L on June 9, reportedly by HAMAS gunmen. Al-Qutob was a reportedly close ally of PLC member Muhammad Dahlan and the deputy head of the PSO Special Operations division in Gaza. During al-Qutob's funeral, three PSO officers were hurt in a gun battle that began when HAMAS gunmen fired on fomer PSO Chief Rashid Abu Shabak's motorcade, according to Fatah sources. In an apparent assassination attempt, a bomb exploded outside the home of Rashid Abu Shabak's chief bodyguard and brother, Muhammad Abu Shabak, early on the morning of June 11. No injuries were reported in the incident. One HAMAS gunman was killed and three other people were injured June 12 during clashes at the funeral of HAMAS militant Husam Abu Anza, who died from wounds sustained during an early May gun-battle.

¶ 16. (C) At 1500L on June 12, HAMAS gunmen began besieging the PSO Headquarters in Rafah. Fatah sources reported that HAMAS gunmen surrounded the building and began firing automatic weapons and RPGs. As of 1830L, one PSO officer has been killed in the ongoing clashes.

WALLES